

Richard Burns Memorial Rally 2011
Peter Jackson/ Steve Coombes
Ford Escort Mk II - Car 12

Royal Air Force Marham & Kings Lynn & District Motor Club
Richard Burns Memorial Rally
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It had been at almost 18 months since I'd sat in the Escort and was looking forward to the event enormously. Seeing us seeded at car 12 with a 120+ quality entry, with a WRC in front and behind certainly got the adrenalin pumping. Friday noise, scrutineering and signing on passed perfectly and we were soon off on a 40 mile round trip to get some fuel from the 'local' Shell garage that closed 2 weeks earlier!!! This didn't help Peter Kenyon's thirst or hunger. We found a station and filled up the jerry cans despite the sign on the pumps stating that the filling of all cans had been stopped due to some yobs throwing it at the police and setting fire to buildings in London. However we were soon sat in the bar having some food (and some fluids to wash it down with) whilst discussing anything you can think of including how many fuel stations we had passed on the way to filling up the cans.

Saturday came and we had an unusual lie in due to an 11, yes 11 o'clock start. Of course it wasn't just turn up, get in the car and drive. No. Change plugs, leads etc. It was raining to boot. What tyres? Cut slicks it was. 5, 4, 3, 2, 1, GO. Despite the rain it was fantastic. I was a bit rusty on the notes as I'd forgotten how quick the car was but we made it and 11th quickest. Impressive considering the conditions. Stage notes tweaked and a drying stage 2 came. Flat out on the limit as always. Unfortunately we hit a cone and damaged the steering costing us 10+ secs. Still a top 10 time and we climbed the leaderboard. Problems sorted (ish) and 17 miles of stage 3. No dramas, on the limit and despite the handling not being perfect 4th fastest stage time. Peter had gone that fast that he was shacking. After some more tweaks to the steering and brakes stage 4 was quicker and we finished the day joint 6th, tied on the same time as another MkII escort, Car 6. An amazing day with plenty to go for on Sunday.

Sunday was back to normal early rally start time. The car started ok and we were off. The Sunday stages ran in the opposite direction and the kerbs seemed a bit more menacing. A clean run, but we dropped 11 secs to car 6. Back in Service the car was on jacks and checked. Then it was off to fuel in the re-fuelling area. The car wouldn't start, even with the booster battery. Our problems had begun. Unable to find the problem the car was bump started and we set off into stage. The car ran perfectly and we pulled 2 secs back on our rival. Awesome run, flat out on the limit again. Peter definitely had a sweat on as did I. The battle was on. Again the car wouldn't start but we made it to the start and we were off. Stage 7 went perfectly and I didn't think it could get any faster. A further 8 seconds gained on our rivals, now up to 6th and after over 100 miles of rallying there was just one second in it for 5th. Off to stage 8. Arrival control done. Queuing for the start. A 5 or so minute delay. Just what we didn't need as the car was not running well. The temp was rising and the volts were dropping. A quick call to service for help but nothing we could do. 5,4,3,2,1,GO. I thought stage 7 was as fast as it got but stage 8 was quicker. Unbelievable. Split 1, right. Good. Round the tricky stuff. Kerbs avoided. Done. Into the final couple of miles. The last few minutes trying to get the car to the finish and disaster. The car started spluttering and our shot at 5th and first in class had gone. Gutted does not describe it. I now know how Carlos and Louis felt when they retired on the RAC a number of years ago near the end of Margram. To make it worse we stopped at the spectator area and everyone crowded around the car. Pete found a quiet spot to gather his thoughts and I made sure the spectators didn't get too close. The last stage was cruel to all of us as Alex also retired and David got a puncture.

Despite the huge disappointment there were a number of positives to take from our weekend which we shouldn't lose sight of. We had come to a new venue and mixed it with some of the quickest machinery and crews in the country. Apart from the electrical problem the car had run well all weekend and handles amazingly. Big thanks to Neil, Peter K, Janet, Nikki and the Myerscough team for their help over the weekend.

Hope its not too long but a lot to write from a brilliant, but disappointing weekend. Next event is the Woodpecker in September.

Steve.

One last thing. We all know how fantastic our Armed Forces are and they showed it over the weekend. They couldn't do enough for us, made us feel very welcome and helped in any way they could. The equipment they had on display sends a shiver down your spine and must be very intimidating when in action. It is something to be proud of and they deserve our support. Thank you from car 12 and the service team.